AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION: OVERVIEW

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Basic Traits of American Science Fiction. Science fiction (SF), a literary genre in which a background of science or pseudoscience is an integral part of the story. Although SF is a form of fantastic literature, many of the events recounted are within the realm of future possibility, e.g., robots, space travel, interplanetary war, invasions from outer space.

SF is generally considered to have had its beginnings in the late 19th century with the romances of Jules Verne and the novels of H.G. Wells.

In the U.S., SF developed in the 1920’s along the lines of scientific and technical predictions (H. Gernsback) and space adventures (E. Smith, E. Hamilton, and E. Burroughs). The best works of American postwar SF, foreshadowed in the 1930’s by the works of J. Campbell, rose to the level of serious social criticism and philosophical generalization (for example, the works of R. Bradbury, W. Tenn, F. Pohl, C. Kornbluth, R. Heinlein, R. Sheckley, and K. Vonnegut), paralleling, as it were, the literature of critical realism and the political-warning novel. However, in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, this trend was replaced by a “new wave” of sci-fi writers (S. Delany, R. Zelazny) who reflected the modernist concern with innovative forms. The works of these writers have fantastic descriptions of the “inner space” of the human mind.

In 1926, Hugo Gernsback founded the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories,* devoted exclusively to SF, particularly to serious explorations into the future. Good writing in the field was further encouraged when John W. Campbell, Jr., founded *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1937. In that magazine much attention was paid to literary and dramatic qualities, theme, and characterization; Campbell "discovered" and popularized many important sci-fi writers, including Isaac Asimov, Frederic Brown, A. E. van Vogt, Lewis Padgett, Eric Frank Russell, Clifford Simak, Theodore Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber, Murray Leinster, Robert Heinlein, Raymond F. Jones, and Robert Sheckley.

SF has established itself as a legitimate branch of literature. C.S. Lewis's “*Out of the Silent Planet”* (1938) used SF as a vehicle for theological speculation, and works such as Aldous Huxley's “*Brave New World”* (1932), George Orwell's “*Nineteen Eighty-four”* (1949), Ray Bradbury's “*Fahrenheit 451”* (1953), and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s “*Cat's Cradle”* (1963) demonstrate the particular effectiveness of the genre as an instrument of social criticism. Sci-fi literature anticipates and comments on political and social concerns, and a variety of SF subgenres have emerged: feminist SF; disaster novels and novels treating the world emerging from a disaster's wake; stories postulating alternative worlds; fantastic voyages to

"inner space"; and "cyberpunk" novels set in "cyberspace," a realm where computerized information possesses three dimensions in a "virtual reality".

The rich variety of notable sci-fi writing to emerge since the "classic" work of Asimov, Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, and Ray Bradbury includes Frank Herbert's *"Dune"* (1965) and its sequels, which conjured up a desert world where issues of ecology, ethics, and human destiny and evolution were played out; Philip K. Dick's satirical and philosophical vision of post-nuclear war southern California in novels such as *"Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"* (1968) and *"Valis"* (1981); the apocalyptic disaster fiction of J. G. Ballard, including *"The Crystal World"* (1966) and *"Vermilion Sands"* (1971); the rigorously science-based works of Poul Anderson, such as *"Tau Zero"* (1970) and *"The Boat of a Million Years"* (1989); Michael Crichton's best-selling sci-fi suspense novels, particularly *"The Andromeda Strain"* (1969) and *"Jurassic Park"* (1990); William Gibson's evocations of urban "cyberpunk" desolation in novels such as *"Count Zero"* (1986) and *"Mona Lisa Overdrive"* (1988); Doris Lessing's *"Canopus in Argos: Archives",* a series of 4 novels (1979–1983) that explores the possibilities of a feminist utopia; and the writing of Ursula Le Guin, who has imagined ecological utopias in works such as *"Always Coming Home"* (1985) and *"The Word for World is Forest"* (1986).

Over recent decades, SF has become popular in the nonliterary media, including film, television, and electronic games. *"Star Wars"* (1977) and its sequels and prequel, *"Close Encounters of the Third Kind"* (1977), and *"E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial"* (1982) were among the most financially successful motion pictures ever produced.

A Brief Biography of Ray Bradbury. Ray Douglas Bradbury, (born August 22, 1920, Waukegan, Illinois, U.S.—died June 5, 2012, Los Angeles, California), American author best known for his highly imaginative short stories and novels that blend a poetic style, nostalgia for childhood, social criticism, and an awareness of the hazards of runaway technology.

As a child, Bradbury loved horror films such as *"The Phantom of the Opera"* (1925); the books of L. Frank Baum and Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the 1st sci-fi magazine, *Amazing Stories*. Bradbury's family moved to Los Angeles in 1934. In 1937 Bradbury joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction League, where he received encouragement from young writers such as Henry Kuttner, Edmond Hamilton, Robert Heinlein, and Leigh Brackett, who met weekly with him. Bradbury published his 1st short story, *"Hollerbochen's Dilemma"* (1938), in the league's "fanzine" *Imagination!* In 1939 Bradbury traveled to the 1st World Science Fiction convention, in New York City, where he met many of the genre's editors. He made his 1st sale to a professional SF magazine in 1941, when his short story *"Pendulum"* (written with Henry Hasse) was published in *Super Science Stories*. Many of Bradbury's earliest stories, with their elements of fantasy and horror, were published in *Weird Tales*. Most of these stories were collected in his 1st book of short stories, *"Dark Carnival"* (1947). Bradbury's style, with its rich use of metaphors and similes, stood out from the more utilitarian work that dominated pulp magazine writing.

In the mid-1940s Bradbury's stories started to appear in major magazines. *"The Martian Chronicles"* (1950), a series of short stories, depicts Earth's colonization of Mars, which leads to the extinction of an idyllic Martian civilization. However, in the face of an oncoming nuclear war, many of the settlers return to Earth, and after Earth's destruction, a

few surviving humans return to Mars to become the new Martians. The short-story collection *"The Illustrated Man"* (1951) included one of his most famous stories, *"The Veldt"*, in which a mother and father are concerned about the effect their house's simulation of lions on the African veldt is having on their children.

Bradbury's next novel, *"Fahrenheit 451"* (1953), is regarded as his greatest work. In a future society where books are forbidden, Guy Montag, a "fireman" whose job is the burning of books, takes a book and is seduced by reading. *"Fahrenheit 451"* has been acclaimed for its anti-censorship themes and its defense of literature against the encroachment of electronic media.

The collection *"The Golden Apples of the Sun"* (1953) contained *"The Fog Horn",* about 2 lighthouse keepers' terrifying encounter with a sea monster; the title story, about a rocket's dangerous journey to scoop up a piece of the Sun; and *"A Sound of Thunder"*, about a safari back to the Mesozoic to hunt a Tyrannosaurus. In 1954 Bradbury spent 6 months in Ireland with director John Huston working on the screenplay for the film *"Moby Dick"* (1956), an experience Bradbury later fictionalized in his novel "*Green Shadows, White Whale"* (1992). After the release of Moby Dick, Bradbury was in demand as a screenwriter in Hollywood and wrote scripts for Playhouse 90, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, and The Twilight Zone.

One of Bradbury's most personal works, *"Dandelion Wine"* (1957), is an autobiographical novel about a magical but too brief summer of a 12-year-old boy in Green Town, Illinois (a fictionalized version of his childhood home of Waukegan). His next collection, *"A Medicine for Melancholy"* (1959), contained *"All Summer in a Day"*, a poignant story of childhood cruelty on Venus, where the Sun comes out only every 7 years. The Midwest of his childhood was once again the setting of *"Something Wicked This Way Comes"* (1962), in which a carnival comes to town run by the mysterious and evil Mr. Dark. The next year, he published his 1st collection of short plays, "The Anthem Sprinters and Other Antics".

In the 1970s Bradbury no longer wrote short fiction at his previous pace, turning his energy to poetry and drama. Earlier in his career he had sold several mystery short stories, and he returned to the genre with *"Death Is a Lonely Business"* (1985), an homage to the detective stories of writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett mixed with an autobiographical setting of 1949 Venice, California, where Bradbury lived at the time. 2 sequels, *"A Graveyard for Lunatics"* (1990) and *"Let's All Kill Constance"* (2002), mined his experiences in 1950s and '60s Hollywood. His final novel, *"Farewell Summer"* (2006), was a sequel to *"Dandelion Wine".*

Bradbury was often considered a sci-fi author, but he said that his only SF book was *"Fahrenheit 451".* Strictly speaking, much of his work was fantasy, horror, or mysteries. He said, "I use a scientific idea as a platform to leap into the air and never come back". He received many honors for his work including an Emmy for his animated adaptation of *"The Halloween Tree"* (1994) and the National Medal of Arts (2004). In 2007 the Pulitzer Prize Board awarded Bradbury a Special Citation for his distinguished career. In all, Bradbury has published more than thirty books, close to 600 short stories, and numerous poems, essays, and plays. His short stories have appeared in more than 1,000 school curriculum "recommended reading" anthologies.

“Fahrenheit 451” (1953). *“Fahrenheit 451”* is a dystopian novel. It is regarded as one of his best works. The novel presents a future American society where books are outlawed and "firemen" burn any that are found.

The story of fireman Guy Montag 1st appeared in *"The Fireman"*, a short story by Ray Bradbury published in *Galaxy Science Fiction* in 1951. Montag's story was expanded 2 years later, in 1953, and was published as *“Fahrenheit 451”.* The novel is divided into 3 parts: "The Hearth and the Salamander", "The Sieve and the Sand", and "Burning Bright".

“Fahrenheit 451”, which takes its title from the temperature at which paper burns, takes place in a sterile, futuristic society in which firemen burn books because the state has decided that books make people unhappy. Suspected readers are arrested. Instead of reading, people listen to “seashells”, tiny radios that fit in the ear, and watch insipid television shows projected on wall-to-wall screens. In school, students play sports and learn nothing. Fast driving is encouraged, and pedestrians are arrested. Indiscriminate drug use, suicide, overpopulation, and war are rampant. In this world lives Guy Montag, the main character, who smilingly and unquestioningly accepts his job as a fireman. Guy’s wife, Mildred, watches endless hours of television and overdoses on narcotics. Early in the novel, a young neighbor, Clarisse, shocks Guy by asking whether he ever reads the books he burns and whether he is happy.

The novel has been the subject of interpretations focusing on the historical role of book burning in suppressing dissenting ideas. In a 1956 radio interview, Bradbury stated that he wrote Fahrenheit 451 because of his concerns at the time (during the McCarthy era) about the threat of book burning in the U.S. In later years, he stated his motivation for writing the book in more general terms.

In 1954, *“Fahrenheit 451”* won the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature and the Commonwealth Club of California Gold Medal. It has since won the Prometheus "Hall of Fame" Award in 1984 and a 1954 "Retro" Hugo Award, 1 of only 4 Best Novel Retro Hugos ever given, in 2004. Bradbury was honored with a Spoken Word Grammy nomination for his 1976 audiobook version.

A Brief Biography of Isaac Asimov. Isaac Asimov**,** (born January 2, 1920, Petrovichi, Russia—died April 6, 1992, New York, New York, U.S.), American author and biochemist, a highly successful and prolific writer of SF and of science books for the layperson. He published about 500 volumes.

Asimov was brought to the U.S. at age 3. He grew up in Brooklyn, New York, graduating from Columbia University in 1939 and taking a Ph.D. there in 1948. He then joined the faculty of Boston University, with which he remained associated thereafter.

Asimov began contributing stories to sci-fi magazines in 1939 and in 1950 published his 1st book, “*Pebble in the Sky”*. His trilogy of novels, “*Foundation”*, “*Foundation and Empire”*, and “*Second Foundation”* (1951–53), which recounts the collapse and rebirth of a vast interstellar empire in the universe of the future, is his most famous work of SF. In the short-story collection “*I, Robot”* (1950; filmed 2004), he developed a set of ethics for robots and intelligent machines (his “Three Laws of Robotics”) that greatly influenced other writers’ treatment of the subject.

His other novels and collections of stories included “*The Stars, like Dust”* (1951), “*The Currents of Space”* (1952), “*The Caves of Steel”* (1954), “*The Naked Sun”* (1957), “*Earth Is Room Enough”* (1957), “*Foundation’s*

Edge” (1982), and “*The Robots of Dawn”* (1983). His “Nightfall” (1941) is thought by many to be the finest SF short story ever written.

Among Asimov’s books on various topics in science, written with lucidity and humor, are “*The Chemicals of Life”* (1954), “*Inside the Atom”* (1956), “*The World of Nitrogen”* (1958), “*Life and Energy”* (1962), “*The Human Brain”* (1964), “*The Neutrino”* (1966), “*Science, Numbers, and I”* (1968), “*Our World in Space”* (1974), and “*Views of the Universe”* (1981). He also published 2 volumes of autobiography.

“I, Robot” (1950). *“I, Robot”* is a collection of 9 short stories by sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov. The stories 1st appeared in sci-fi magazines between 1940 and 1950, the year they 1st appeared together in book form.

The stories are linked by a framing narrative involving an interview between a reporter and retired robopsychologist Susan Calvin, who relates her work with dysfunctional robots and the problems inherent in human-robot interactions. The 9 stories include: *"Robbie"* (1940, 1950), *"Runaround"* (1942), *"Reason"* (1941), *"Catch That Rabbit"* (1944), *"Liar!"* (1941), *"Little Lost Robot"* (1947), *"Escape!"* (1945), *"Evidence"* (1946), *"The Evitable Conflict"* (1950).

Although the stories can be read separately, they share a theme of the interaction of humans, robots, and morality, and when combined they tell a larger story of Asimov's fictional history of robotics.

It is in these stories that Asimov took the fundamental step of treating robots not like Frankenstein’s monster, something created by mad scientists that eventually threatens its creator (what Asimov termed the “Frankenstein complex”), but as aware entities with their own set of programmed ethics. In the story *“Runaround,”* Asimov sets forth his famed *Three Laws of Robotics:*

1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

2) robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the 1st Law.

30 A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the 1st or 2nd Law.

Asimov deliberately left loopholes in these injunctions, and each of the tales is a detective story of sorts in which Calvin or her colleagues at the U.S. Robotics and Mechanical Men Inc. - Donovan and Powell - discover which ambiguity or conflict between the laws is causing the robot to behave in an unexpected way.

The stories are arranged chronologically with the development of “positronic robots” (Asimov’s term for increasingly human-like creations). The 1st robot to appear is Robbie, the perfect playmate for a young girl, who because of him becomes isolated from other children. Other robots include Nestor-10, whose programming conflict can only be solved by adjusting the 1st Law so he can allow his employers to put themselves at risk in order to do their work.

Asimov’s *Three Laws* have spread throughout SF, and almost every robot in books or film is now created with these governing laws in mind.

A Brief Biography of Stephen King. Stephen Edwin King, (born September 21, 1947, Portland, Maine, U.S.), American novelist and short-story writer whose books were credited with reviving the genre of horror fiction in the late 20th century.

King graduated from the University of Maine in 1970 with a bachelor's degree in English. While writing short stories he supported himself by teaching and working as a janitor, among other jobs. His 1st published novel, *"Carrie"*, about a tormented teenage girl gifted with telekinetic powers, appeared in 1974 and was an immediate popular success.

"Carrie" was the 1st of many novels in which King blended horror, the macabre, fantasy, and SF. Among such works were *"Salem's Lot"* (1975); *"The Shining"* (1977); *"The Stand"* (1978); *"The Dead Zone"* (1979); *"Firestarter"* (1980); *"Cujo"* (1981); *"The Running Man"* (1982); *"Christine"* (1983); *"Thinner"* (1984); *"It"* (1986); *"Misery"* (1987); *"The Tommyknockers"* (1987); *"The Dark Half"* (1989); *"Needful Things"* (1991); *"Dolores Claiborne"* (1993); *"Dreamcatcher"* (2001); *"Cell"* (2006); *"Lisey's Story"* (2006); *"Duma Key"* (2008); *"Under the Dome"* (2009); *"11/22/63"* (2011); *"Joyland"* (2013); *"Doctor Sleep"* (2013), a sequel to *"The Shining"*; and *"Revival"* (2014). Most of these novels were filmed.

King published several of those works, including *"The Dead Zone"* and *"The Running Man"*, under the pseudonym Richard Bachman. A collection of the 1st 4 Bachman novels, *"The Bachman Books"* (1985), contains the essay *"Why I Was Bachman"*. *"Mr. Mercedes"* (2014), *"Finders Keepers"* (2015), and *"End of Watch"* (2016) formed a trilogy of hard-boiled crime novels centering on retired detective Bill Hodges.

King also wrote a serial novel, *"The Dark Tower"*, whose 1st installment, *"The Gunslinger",* appeared in 1982; an 8th volume was published in 2012. A film adaptation of the series was released in 2017.

In his books King explored almost every terror-producing theme imaginable, from vampires, rabid dogs, deranged killers, and a pyromaniac to ghosts, extrasensory perception and telekinesis, biological warfare, and even a malevolent automobile.

In his later fiction, exemplified by *"Dolores Claiborne",* King departed from the horror genre to provide sharply detailed psychological portraits of his protagonists, many of them women, who confront difficult and challenging circumstances. Though his work was sometimes disparaged as undisciplined and inelegant, King was a talented storyteller whose books gained their effect from realistic detail, forceful plotting, and the author's undoubted ability to involve and scare the reader. His work consistently addressed such themes as the potential for politics and technology to disrupt or even destroy an individual human life. Obsession, the forms it can assume, and its power to wreck individuals, families, and whole communities was a recurring theme in King's fiction, driving the narratives of *"Christine", "Misery",* and *"Needful Things".*

By the early 1990s King's books had sold more than 100 million copies worldwide, and his name had become synonymous with the genre of horror fiction. His short fiction was collected in such volumes as *"Night Shift"* (1978), *"Nightmares and Dreamscapes"* (1993), *"Hearts in Atlantis"* (1999), *"Just After Sunset"* (2008), and *"The Bazaar of Bad Dreams"* (2015). He wrote several motion-picture screenplays.

King explored both his own career and the craft of writing in *"On Writing"* (2000), a book he completed as he was recovering from severe injuries received after being struck by a car. King experimented with different forms of book distribution: *"The Plant: Zenith Rising"* was released in 2000 solely as an e-book, distributed via the Internet, with readers asked but not required to pay for it, and the novella *"UR"* was made available in

2009 only to users of the Kindle electronic reading device. The short story *"Drunken Fireworks"* was released in 2015 as an audiobook prior to its print publication.

King received a lot of awards. Moreover, his novella *"Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption"* was the basis for the movie "The Shawshank Redemption" which is widely regarded 1 of the greatest films of all time. His novella *"The Way Station"* (1980) was a Nebula Award novelette nominee. His short story *"The Man in the Black Suit"* (1994) received the O. Henry Award.

"The Man in the Black Suit" (1994). *"The Man in the Black Suit"* is a short story by S. King. It was originally published in the October 31, 1994 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine. In 1995, it won the World Fantasy Award and the O. Henry Award for Best Short Fiction.

"The Man in the Black Suit" is a frame story. The frame consists of a decrepit old man resolving to erase his haunting memory of meeting the devil when he was nine years old. Writing it down, he believes, will give him release; and writing it in a book marked Diary and placing it by his bedside will ensure that someday someone will read his story after he is gone.

Although this short story is not formally divided into parts, it is as skillfully constructed as a well-made play, the action inside the frame unfolding organically in 5 stages. 1st, the milieu of the town of Motton in the early years of the 20th century is re-created. The world was different then. There were no neighborhoods; farms were separated by long distances and the land was largely forests and swamp. "In those days there were ghosts everywhere". 2nd, Gary's close relationship with his parents is provided along with a vivid word picture of his mother kneading bread in her kitchen. The 3rd stage consists of Gary's journey through the woods, catching 2 fine trout, meeting the devil, and narrowly escaping with his life. Stage 4 is his joyous reunion with his father, and the 5th stage is their going back to Castle Stream to retrieve Gary's fishing gear and the father instinctively sensing that something is terribly wrong.

This is a retrospective story, the action occurring more than 80 years in the past, and yet King is able to create such convincing characters and clearly realized settings as to make the story as immediate as the present. Verisimilitude is essential to all literature, but it is especially vital to literature of the supernatural. King achieves this quality of believability by creating a narrator of unimpeachable integrity; by references to familiar places, and by a kind of matter-of-fact style of narration. The story is filled with striking images and metaphors, one of the most memorable being the narrator's comparison of his body to a child's sand castle soon to be washed away by the incoming tide.

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